DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 882 CE 070 322

TITLE	What Makes a Literacy Program Good? Some Ideas for Discussion.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Dept. of Education, Toronto.
PUB DATE	17 Mar 93
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Demonstration Programs; *Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; Program Content; Program Design; Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation

ABSTRACT

This paper describes seven ideas that would help a literacy program work well. Some examples are given to show how each idea could be used in different parts of a literacy program. Some questions are also listed that could stimulate discussion about each idea. The seven quality guidelines or ideas are as follows: (1) community focus--a good literacy program recognizes that each place of group of people has different needs and interests; (2) access to services--a good literacy program makes sure that the people who need the program can take part; (3) learner-centered approach--a good literacy program makes sure that learners have an equal voice in deciding what they want to learn and how they will do it; (4) effective programs and staff--a good literacy program makes sure that each learner has a positive learning experience and reaches as many goals as possible; (5) benefits from the program (equity of outcome)--a good literacy program makes sure that everyone gets what he or she needs from the program, to the best of each person's ability; (6) integration--a good literacy program helps adults to continue their learning; and (7) accountability--a good literacy program is managed and provides the best programs possible. (YLB)

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ED 388 882

What makes a literacy program good?

Some Ideas for Discussion

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Ministry of Education
Literacy Branch
March 17, 1993

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This paper is a summary of Guidelines for Effective Literacy Programs in Ontario, a discussion paper prepared for the Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education.

The complete discussion paper includes information about a number of topics that are not included in this paper, such as:

- **the Ontario Government's Plan for Adult Basic Literacy**
- **the Adult Literacy Policy and Evaluation Project of the Ministry of Education**
- **the people involved in the Steering Committee of the Project**
- **the types of people who take part in adult literacy programs**
- **the types of organizations that offer adult literacy programs**
- **the sources of funding for adult literacy programs**
- **the effects on adult literacy of trends such as new technology, unemployment and job training.**

If you would like a copy of the complete paper, it is available from:

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What is this paper about?

This paper gives some ideas about what makes a literacy program good. Not all of the ideas apply to every literacy program, because all programs are not the same. These are not the only ideas - you may have some other suggestions.

The Literacy Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education would like to know what you think of these ideas. We hope that people who take part in literacy programs as learners, students, staff or volunteers, will take some time to discuss them.

Why is it important?

Your ideas will help the Ministry of Education develop guidelines for literacy programs to judge whether they are doing a good job. New programs will be able to use the guidelines to decide what they want to do, and the best ways to do it. Older programs will find ideas for improving their work or expanding into new areas. The guidelines will help to make sure that the money spent on literacy is used well. Most important, they will help to make sure that literacy programs do a good job for their students, no matter what the students' needs may be.

Why do we need guidelines?

The Ontario government started supporting literacy programs in 1986. There are now more than 800 different literacy programs, offered by school boards, colleges, community groups, unions, and employers. These programs work in many different ways to help adults learn what they want and need to know. But no guidelines or policies have been set for how all literacy programs should operate, or what they should do.

Over the past year, Literacy Branch staff have talked with many people about how to improve Ontario's literacy programs, now and in the future. One suggestion was to set "quality guidelines", or goals, for how literacy programs in Ontario should operate. Each program could use these guidelines to develop a detailed plan to improve or expand its work.

What are "quality guidelines"?

Quality guidelines can also be called goals or guidelines. They describe the ideas that help a literacy program work well. Many programs will already be using some, or all, of these ideas. Other programs may discover new ways to work with learners and community agencies. Each program will decide which goals are most important, and how they want to reach them. The guidelines will make it easier to decide if a program is doing a good job.

What ideas are included in "quality guidelines"?

This paper describes seven ideas that would help a literacy program work well. Different programs will use these ideas in different ways. What they will do depends on the community, the people involved in the program, the amount of funding available, and the things that learners want.

The seven ideas are listed below. Some examples are given to show how each idea could be used in different parts of a literacy program. We have also listed some questions we would like you to think about as you discuss each idea.

Quality Guidelines - seven ideas for discussion

1. *Community Focus* - A good literacy program recognizes that each place or group of people has different needs and interests.

A good literacy program finds out what the community or group wants, and offers programs to meet those needs. It works with other literacy programs and local service agencies to plan programs and share resources. It helps learners find out about their community and the services available to them.

Questions for discussion

- How can you tell if a program has a community focus?
- How should literacy programs meet community needs?
- What makes it hard for local programs to work together? What would make it easier?
- Do the examples above explain what "community focus" means?
- Can you think of other ways in which a program might show it has a "community focus"?

2. *Access to Services* - A good literacy program makes sure that the people who need the program can take part.

A good literacy program is in a place that is easy to get to. It accepts all kinds of people, including people with disabilities. The staff welcomes everyone and make each person feel comfortable. It makes sure that

people with disabilities can take part, by having ramps or large print materials. People can come to the program at convenient times. If learners need help with child care or transportation, the program can help to arrange it. The program tries to attract learners in many different ways. It promotes public support for literacy.

Questions for discussion

- What stops people from coming to literacy programs? What would make it easier?
- Why should a program include a broad range of learners? Can you think of reasons why a program might decide not to?
- What can literacy programs do to make everyone feel welcome?
- Do the examples above explain what "access to services" means?
- Can you think of other ways in which a program can make sure that people who need the program are able to take part?

3. *Learner-centred Approach* - A good literacy program makes sure that learners have an equal voice in deciding what they want to learn and how they will do it.

A good literacy program has a clear statement of its goals, values and teaching methods, written in a way that is easy to understand. These ideas are discussed with learners so they can decide if the program is right for them.

Learners decide what they want to learn and what their goals are. They take an equal part in choosing learning materials and teaching methods.

The instructors use a variety of teaching methods designed for adults. They recognize different learning styles and cultural backgrounds. They also recognize what learners already know, and build on their skills and interests.

Learners take part in evaluating their learning, so they always know how they are doing. Learners also take part in deciding whether they should go to a different program, if this one does not meet their needs. Learners also take part in committees that decide the direction of the program.

Questions for discussion

- How can you tell if a program has a learner-centred approach?
- What make it hard for programs to use a learner-centred approach?
- Do the examples above explain what "learner-centred approach" means?
- Can you think of other ways a program can show it has a learner-centred approach?

4. *Effective Programs and Staff* - A good literacy program makes sure that each learner has a positive learning experience, and reaches as many goals as possible.

A good literacy program believes that people learn throughout their lives in many different ways and places. Staff, tutors and learners are all respected for their knowledge and understanding.

Program staff and volunteer tutors are all trained and experienced in working with adults. They have opportunities to learn new skills and

teaching methods. There are enough instructors or tutors to make sure each learner gets time and attention. Counsellors and other support staff are available to work with learners on other needs.

The program uses different ways of teaching that are suited to adults. All teaching methods respect learners as equal partners in their learning. Reading, writing and math skills are taught as tools for finding out about the world, as well as solving practical problems. Learners have many opportunities to express their experience and views in a variety of ways.

Evaluation is an important part of the program. Learners take part in evaluating their learning and setting new goals. It is important that learners feel satisfied with their progress and with the program.

Questions for discussion

- How should learners take part in deciding and evaluating their programs?
- What is the best way to make sure that literacy instructors and tutors are well trained?
- Should there be special training programs for adult literacy instructors?
- Do the examples above explain what "effective programs and staff" means?
- Can you think of other ways to judge whether programs and staff are effective?

5. *Benefits from the Program (Equity of Outcome)* - A good literacy program makes sure that everyone gets what he or she needs from the program, to the best of each person's ability. Everyone should feel they had the same chance to have a good quality program. Everyone should feel their special needs were met.

A good literacy program recognizes that each learner or student has different needs and goals. It makes sure that everyone has a program that meets those needs, and will help reach the goals.

The program also tries to reduce barriers which prevent people from taking part in any way. If someone with a physical disability needs special materials or equipment, the program will try to make sure they are available. It may be necessary to hire someone who knows sign language to communicate with a Deaf learner.

People of different cultures, languages or races are respected and encouraged to take part. The program provides a variety of learning materials. It changes the content and teaching methods to meet different cultural needs. The program makes sure that instructors or tutors can speak the same language as the students.

Questions for discussion

- What are some of the problems programs face when they try to make sure that everyone benefits?
- How can programs make sure that everyone has access to a program (no barriers)?

- Do the examples above explain what "equity of outcome" means?

- Can you think of other examples that show how to make sure each person will get benefit from a program?

6. *Integration* - A good literacy program helps adults to continue their learning.

A good literacy program is linked with other adult education programs in the community. It helps learners decide on their long-term goals for work or education. It helps learners develop a plan to reach their goals. It can provide programs that prepare learners for other courses or for work.

The program works together with other agencies so each learner has access to a variety of services and programs.

Questions for discussion

- How can a literacy program help its students decide on long-term goals?
- What things make it hard for learners to go on to other programs? What would make it easier?
- In your community, how do adult education programs work together? Is it easy or hard to go from one program to another?
- Do the examples above explain what "integration" means?
- Are there other examples that show how literacy programs should work with other organizations?

7. *Accountability* - A good literacy program is managed well and provides the best programs possible.

A good literacy program has clear goals and objectives. The staff agree with the philosophy of the program and discuss it with learners. There is a clear plan of action to reach the goals. It is easy to evaluate the results of all programs.

Learners take part in evaluating programs and teaching methods. Goals, programs and methods are reviewed regularly. They are improved or changed to meet new conditions.

The program keeps accurate records of its activities and finances. It stays within its budget and runs the best program possible. It offers good working conditions for its staff and volunteers, and supports them in developing their skills.

Questions for discussion

- How are programs reviewed and evaluated? How are learners involved?
- How has limited funding affected your program?
- What information should a funder expect from a program?
- Do the examples above explain what "accountability" means?
- Are there other examples that would show that literacy programs are well managed and accountable to learners and funders?

What comes next?

The Literacy Branch wants people involved with literacy to discuss these ideas with others from the program. Other questions may come up in your discussions. For example, many people want to know how quality guidelines will be used, and who will evaluate programs. Other people are concerned that there is not enough funding for all the literacy programs we need. None of these questions have been decided yet.

The Literacy Branch wants you to be involved in developing the quality guidelines and deciding how they will be used. Please share your ideas with your program's representative.

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